

Testimony by John Murphy on behalf of the Connecticut State Employees Association SEIU Local 2001

Education Committee

March 15, 2023

**IN SUPPORT -- HB 6881 An Act Concerning Various Revisions to the Education Statutes
Related to Educator Compensation and Paraeducators**

Good afternoon Senator McCrory, Representative Currey, Senator Berthel, Representative McCarty and members of the Education Committee. My name is John Murphy and I am a resident of East Hartford. I work as a Staff Representative for the Connecticut State Employees Association SEIU Local 2001 and represent paraeducators in the towns of Andover and Willington. I was elected as Town Treasurer in East Hartford in 2021 and serve as the Chair of our town's Pension and Retiree Benefits Board. I am testifying today in support of *HB 6881, An Act Concerning Various Revisions to the Education Statutes Related to Educator Compensation and Paraeducators*.

I have the utmost respect for all paraeducators because of the vital services they provide every day to enrich and reinforce student learning. They provide one-on-one guidance to special education students, clarify instruction when students have difficulty understanding and work with their teachers to manage classrooms. Some paraeducators have to change students' diapers every day. Although it's not an issue for the towns I represent, paraeducators play a vital role in supporting English language learners in cities and towns across Connecticut. They provide a positive and nurturing classroom atmosphere, praising their students when they succeed and try to rechannel them when they act out verbally and physically.

In spite of the important role they play in educating our students, paraeducators are among the lowest paid staff members in our schools. They don't take these jobs to become rich, they take them to make a difference in students' lives. Paraeducators have major problems affording healthcare and many are forced to work a second or third job just to survive. As ten month employees, they aren't paid during the summer and they cannot collect Unemployment Insurance. There are far too many districts in Connecticut whose pay for paraeducators hovers around the minimum wage. It is no wonder there is a mass exodus of paraeducators leaving the profession, leaving more than 1,300 paraeducator positions vacant in districts throughout the state.

We understand that this bill requires an investment by the State if we are going to do the right thing for paraeducators. It will cost money to establish a minimum salary for teachers and paraeducators and to work with Boards of Education to provide the resources to make sure that health insurance is affordable and retiree benefits are established for all.

HB 6881 is a vital and necessary step in improving the financial stability, work life and career opportunities of Connecticut's paraeducators. But most of all, this bill is an opportunity to begin to treat paraeducators with the respect and dignity they have earned. It is time for the Education Committee and all the members of the General Assembly to take immediate and meaningful action to raise paraeducator pay, lower their healthcare costs, establish meaningful retirement benefits and give them the tools they need to help students succeed.

Please support student learning by prioritizing paraeducators and passing HB 6881. Thank you.